



Office of Congressman John Linder

U.S. Representative • (GA-7)

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CHAIRMAN LINDER HOLDS HEARING ON NATIONAL BIODEFENSE STRATEGY

Washington, D.C. – Today, Congressman John Linder (R-GA), Chairman of the Homeland Security Subcommittee on Prevention of Nuclear and Biological Attack, held a hearing on “Implementing the National Biodefense Strategy.” The hearing examined known and existing bioterrorism pathogens, and the Federal government’s progress in coordinating a national biodefense program. Bioterrorism is a unique threat due to pathogens that can mimic naturally occurring diseases and technology that is widely distributed and readily available in the public domain.

“The wide range of possible biological agents makes it impossible to anticipate every conceivable attack,” Linder said. “And as science advances and biotechnology spreads, the list of possible agents will continue to evolve. Both of these facts bring us to two irreducible points – people and intelligence. If we are to be successful in mounting a defense against bio-terrorism, every aspect of our strategy must utilize to the maximum extent possible the capability of the intelligence community, and the efforts of each Federal agency tasked with protecting our country against bioterrorism must be closely coordinated with the intelligence community. Science, tools, re-agents, and technology may be ubiquitous. Scientists, however, are not. We have to do a better job of keeping track of those individuals with skill sets that are attractive to potential terrorists.”

Biological agents are unique among weapons of mass destruction in that their effects can be mitigated by effective detection and countermeasure administration. Recognizing this, the Federal government has put significant resources into bolstering scientific expertise and research and development efforts. Among other efforts, the U.S. has mobilized its unrivaled biomedical research infrastructure and expanded its international research relationships. In addition, it has an established medical and public health infrastructure that is being revitalized and expanded.

To provide a blueprint for the coordinated efforts of the national biodefense program, and to better specify the key roles played by each of the major departments with responsibility in this area, the President released in April 2004, the Homeland Security Presidential Directive 10: *Biodefense for the 21st Century*, which fully integrates the sustained efforts of the national and homeland security, medical, public health, intelligence, diplomatic, and law enforcement communities. The essential pillars of the U.S. national biodefense program are: Threat Awareness, Prevention and Protection, Surveillance and Detection, and Response and Recovery. In each of these pillars, the Departments of Homeland Security, Health and Human Services, and Defense assume critical responsibilities that can be fulfilled only through significant investment in scientific expertise and research and development, and through cooperation with one another.

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“Throughout history, infectious diseases have been a constant for civilization,” Linder continued. “However, al-Qaeda’s intentions have added a decidedly sinister aspect to natural disease and engineered organisms. The reason this Subcommittee puts a premium on preventing a bioterrorism attack is simple – even a limited bio-attack would have tremendous human costs, not just in this country, but around the world, and the social and economic disruption would be catastrophic to our way of life. While the threat of terrorists and terrorism will remain with us for the foreseeable future, the civilized world outnumbers them. If we remain committed to sustaining our collaborations and building a defense that makes us safe from bioterrorism, we also build for this nation an enduring scientific and medical preparedness capability.”

Witnesses at the hearing included: Dr. Julie Louise Gerberding, Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Department of Health and Human Services; Dr. Anthony S. Fauci, Director, National Institutes of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, National Institutes of Health, Department of Health and Human Services; Brigadier General Eric B. Schoomaker, Commanding General, U.S. Army Medical Research and Materiel Command, Department of Defense; Dr. John Vitko, Director, Biological Countermeasures Portfolio, Science and Technology Directorate, Department of Homeland Security.

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